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SUBJECT: VISIT TO PROVINCIAL CAPITAL HIGHLIGHTS U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN
DEVELOPMENT OF PHILIPPINES

¶1. Summary. Ambassador Kenney's February 20 visit to Cebu City showcased the continuing U.S. commitment to the economic and social development of the Philippines. The Ambassador attended an environmental rally to celebrate and encourage the protection of the environment, visited a rapidly expanding U.S. business, toured a Peace Corps volunteer site, and paid a courtesy call on the headquarters for Central Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. The Ambassador also spoke with national and local media about U.S. interests in the region and new benefits for Filipino veterans included in the recent U.S. stimulus bill. End Summary.

Background: Cebu City and Cebu

¶2. Cebu City, the capital of the province of Cebu, is the largest city in the Central Visayas Region and the second most populous city in the Philippines, with 798,908 inhabitants as of the 2007 census. Cebu City, one of the major centers of education in the country, hosts a number of national and international corporations. The entry of business process outsourcing (BPO) firms has contributed to the rapid growth of the local economy in recent years.

USAID Event Emphasizes Environment

¶3. USAID's Energy and Clean Air Project (ECAP) sponsored the launch of "Clean Air Youth Alliance (CAYA) Kids - Cebu". CAYA Kids joined their older counterparts of CAYA Youth (college-age students) to advocate for cleaner air and energy use in a rally held at the newly completed Legislative Building at the City Hall Complex in Cebu City. Acting Mayor Michael Rama presided and gave the keynote address with the Ambassador delivering an inspirational message to the youth. Several CAYA Kids read pledges for clean air. The assembly culminated in the release of doves to symbolize giving wings to the environmental goals of the students.

NCR, Expanding U.S. Business

¶4. The Ambassador's visit to the NCR facilities of U.S.-based NCR firm in Cebu City showed the positive economic and social impact NCR is having in the Philippines. NCR is one of the global leaders in production of banking automated teller machines, retail self-service checkout, and other self-service check-in kiosks in travel and healthcare application. The Ambassador toured and tested products throughout the facility, which opened in 2003 and has grown to employ almost 500 Filipinos in well-paying, and upwardly mobile jobs. Currently NCR is limited in space and works day and night shifts to maximize production. NCR executives explained that the company is in the process of building new facilities in which they can employ up to 1000 developers and product testers.

Peace Corps Volunteers Contribute to Social Programs

¶5. The Ambassador also visited the SOS Children's Center (SOS), an international non-government organization that provides alternative family-based care for orphaned, abandoned and neglected children. Two Peace Corps volunteers were on hand for the Ambassador's visit. The Ambassador was briefed on the operations of SOS and discussed

the work and contributions of Peace Corps volunteers. The Ambassador toured the facilities and visited with the children and social workers.

Ambassador's Visit to Military Central Command

¶6. The Ambassador met with Brigadier General Isidoro Macaranas and his staff at Central Command of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (CENTCOM) at Camp Lapu-Lapu. The CENTCOM staff discussed their responsibilities and initiatives, including identifying and disarming leftist rebel groups. The Ambassador emphasized human rights in her discussion with the General. She highlighted continued joint operations in providing humanitarian assistance in the region.

Regional Media, International Perspectives

¶7. In a number of regional television, radio, and print interviews conducted during the trip, the Ambassador underscored the continuing U.S. commitment to Philippine economic and social development, the importance of the environment, the role of U.S. businesses as responsible partners of economic growth, and the importance of the Peace Corps program. In the wake of the recently passed U.S. stimulus bill, the Ambassador described the outreach efforts of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to register applications for all Filipino veterans who qualify for the benefits for their service in World War II. In all interaction with the media, she underscored that the close ties and excellent relations between the U.S. and the Philippines will remain the same with the new Administration.

KENNEY